



28. marts 2007

Referat af rådsmødet (ECOFIN) den 27. marts 2007

Dagsordenspunkt: Stabilitets- og konvergensprogrammer

Rådet vedtog udtalelser om stabilitetsprogrammer for Spanien og Belgien samt konvergensprogrammer for Letland, Bulgarien og Rumænien.

Der var enighed om, at medlemslandene i højere grad bør benytte de aktuelt ”gode tider” til at gennemføre strukturelle forbedringer og sikre langsigtet holdbarhed af de offentlige finanser samt for hovedparten af landene at undgå procyklisk finanspolitik.

Dagsordenspunkt: Rådets prioriteter for EU’s budget for 2008

Der blev vedtaget rådskonklusioner (*jf. vedlagte bilag*), som beskriver Rådets prioriteter for EU’s budget for 2008.

Dagsordenspunkt: Kommissionens handlingsplan for en integreret struktur for intern kontrol

Kommissionen præsenterede en statusrapport for handlingsplanen for en integreret struktur for intern kontrol med EU’s budget, mhp. at fremme arbejdet mod at Revisionsretten kan give en revisionspåtegning uden forbehold vedr. betalingerne fra EU’s budget.

Statusrapporten viser gode fremskridt i arbejdet, herunder at 12 af 40 tiltag er implementeret og de resterende 28 ventes implementeret i løbet af 2007.

Rådet ventes at vende tilbage til sagen på Rådsmødet den 5. juni 2007 og Kommissionen forventer at have en endelig rapport færdig primo 2008.

Dagsordenspunkt: Direktivforslag om erhvervelse af større aktieposter i finansielle virksomheder

Rådet opnåede politisk enighed om direktivforslaget om de nationale tilsyns vurderinger af ansøgninger om erhvervelser af større aktieposter i finansielle virksomheder. Formålet med direktivet er at lette fusioner og virksomhedsopkøb på tværs af grænserne i EU, og dermed øge integrationen af de finansielle markeder.

Direktivforslaget ventes endeligt vedtaget på et kommende Rådsmøde.

Dagsordenspunkt: Betalingsdirektivet

Rådet nåede til enighed om betalingsdirektivet, som har til formål at skabe rammerne for hurtige og effektive betalingstjenesteydelser på tværs af grænserne. Med direktivforslaget indføres harmoniserede regler vedrørende bl.a. kapitalkrav, kreditgivning og informationskrav for såkaldte betalingsinstitutter.

Direktivforslaget påvirker hverken den nuværende finansieringsmodel for Dankortet eller de danske forbrugerbeskyttelsesregler i tilfælde af misbrug af betalingskort.

Formandskabet arbejder for at nå en aftale med Europa-Parlamentet om direktivforslaget i 1. læsning.

Diverse:

I margin af mødet drøftedes den økonomiske situation i EU og formanden for eurogruppen af rapporterede om gruppens møde den 26. marts 2007.

Bilag:

Rådskonklusioner om prioriteterne for EU's budget 2008

- "1. The Council points out that the 2008 budgetary procedure, the second one within the 2007-2013 financial framework, falls in a period of both consolidation and development for the achievement of the European Union's objectives and priorities. The EU is faced with the challenge of guaranteeing the continuity and coherence of actions while pursuing forward-looking policies to adjust to a fast changing world.
2. The Council confirms that the Interinstitutional Agreement (IIA) on budgetary discipline and sound financial management of 17 May 2006 is the base for the establishment of the 2008 budget and has to be applied to the full. The Council underlines the importance it attaches to compliance with the financial framework and the strict respect of the annual limits set therein.
3. In this context, the Council is fully aware that a good collaboration between the two arms of the budgetary authority and the Commission is an essential element in achieving a satisfactory result and looks forward to establishing an effective spirit of co-operation throughout the whole 2008 budgetary procedure.
4. The Council recalls the importance of maintaining an overall budgetary discipline and considers that the same degree of budgetary constraints exercised by the Member States for their own national budgets should be applied to the EU budget. In this context, the Council reiterates its wish that the annual 2008 budget should provide sufficient and justified level of resources to ensure an efficient and effective implementation of EU policies.
5. The Council strongly believes that at the beginning of a new financial period it is very important to maintain in the final budget sufficient margin below the ceilings of the various Headings, with the exception of Heading 1b, for the purpose of sound financial management and of dealing with unexpected needs.
6. In order to achieve the best possible use of resources, both commitment and payment appropriations for 2008 should reflect real and well defined needs and be compatible with the ceilings set in the financial framework. Moreover, absorption capacity and past implementation should be carefully taken into account when establishing appropriations. The Council reaffirms the importance of reprioritisation and reallocation. This would provide to the budgetary authority the necessary flexibility to adapt the appropriations to meet present and future needs in a realistic way.

7. The Council encourages the Commission and the Member States to pursue their efforts to deliver better forecasts. However, it points out that, while it is up to the Member States to present structural operations estimates as accurate as possible, it is the Commission that bears the ultimate responsibility for the assessment of the actual needs and for the appropriations introduced in the Preliminary Draft Budget (PDB).
8. The Council reiterates the great importance of keeping the payment appropriations firmly under control. The Council is aware that the estimates for the 2008 budget are particularly challenging, the second year of the new financial period entailing both advance payments for new actions, intermediate payments and the closure of the programmes related to the previous financial period. A sufficient and justified level of payment appropriations should be entered in the budget, taking into account past implementation and realistic needs. It exhorts all the parties involved to make every possible effort to avoid overestimation.
9. While acknowledging the progress made recently in the establishment of the Preliminary Draft Budget estimates, the Council calls on the Commission to increase its efforts to further improve it, so as to substantially reduce the difference between the PDB and outturn, as illustrated in the annex. Under these circumstances the PDB would be a benchmark throughout the whole budgetary procedure. In this context, the Council stresses the need for a constant monitoring and improvement of budget implementation to contribute towards avoiding the significant under-use of funds that occurred in the beginning of the financial perspective 2000-2006.
10. The Council asks the Commission to provide all the updated information necessary throughout the year to allow the budgetary authority to adapt the budget in a realistic way. The Council welcomes the "budget forecast alert system" and expects it to be further improved. Such a monitoring system would facilitate and justify the proposal and adoption, in due time, of adjusting measures by means of the appropriate budgetary tools, including letters of amendment.
11. The Council recalls that high quality Activity Statements and timely financial information on spending proposals are a prerequisite condition for the budgetary authority to confirm and establish priorities. It looks forward to the improvement of the "Activity Based Budgeting" (ABB) in 2008, in particularly regarding performance indicators. The Council reiterates its commitment to make constructive use of the information provided together with the PDB, particularly regarding the justification of the level of appropriations allocated to the different programmes and policies and the proposed variations. The Council

stresses its willingness to continue an enhanced examination of a set of Activity Statements during the 2008 budgetary procedure. The results of the analysis of the Activity Statements shall continue to have budgetary implications.

12. As regards some sectoral issues, the Council wishes the following elements to be kept constantly in mind in preparing the 2008 budget:

- The Council encourages the Commission to continue its efforts together with the Member States in order to establish an accurate level of payments for structural funds. The Council stresses the importance of fully implementing efficiently and effectively the provisions contained in the legislative framework adopted for the 2007-2013 period, in particular by issuing timely guidelines regarding the simplification of procedures.

The Council reminds the Commission of its commitment to provide the budgetary authority with detailed information on the adoption of the structural funds programmes, in particular on advance payments, together with the PDB.

- The Commission is invited, as in the previous years, to present realistic and well defined forecasts regarding CAP expenditure in its Preliminary Draft Budget and in its letter of amendment taking into account the past implementation as well as the foreseeable market prices evolution at European and international level. Particular attention should be given to ensuring that the payment appropriations for expenditure related to rural development are accurate.
- As regards external actions, the Council considers that the European Union must confirm and develop its role as a global player and expects its priorities to be taken into account. In this context, the Council recalls the importance it attaches to the Common Foreign and Security Policy funding and stresses that the level of appropriations has to be fully in line with the provisions and amounts established in the IIA.

The Council strongly believes that an adequate margin within the ceiling of Heading 4 is of the highest importance for the European Union, so as to be able to take quick and effective action in the case of unexpected needs and crisis. In this context, the Council points out that in the 2008 budgetary procedure an amount of EUR 200 millions, earmarked for the Guarantee Fund in the annual financial framework, will become available under Heading 4 because of the recent implementation of a new mech-

anism for financing the Fund. The Council considers that this amount should remain unused and added to the margin.

- Recalling the common objective of reducing bureaucracy and bearing in mind the parallel efforts of the Member States and the gains achieved, the Council considers it essential to monitor and to improve EU institutions' effectiveness with a view to achieving greater administrative efficiency and stresses the crucial importance of redeployment and reorganisation. To this end, it recalls the importance it attaches to the fact that all institutions as well as an independent body provide a comprehensive cost/benefit analysis of administrative resources. Furthermore, the Council recalls the Commission's commitment to undertake a medium term evaluation of its staff needs by 30 April 2007.

In addition, the Council exhorts all institutions to present their analysis and plans for economies of scale. These reports would provide the budgetary authority all the appropriate information to evaluate the situation and take an objective decision on how to allocate and use the resources in the best possible way. The objective should be to achieve a substantial efficiency gain, mainly by further development of targeted measures and by redeployment and reorganisation of administrative structures in each EU institution.

- Moreover, the Council urges the Commission to improve clarity in the area of administrative spending, by presenting a clear consolidated picture of all administrative expenditure, including agencies.
- As far as the European Union's decentralised agencies are concerned, the Council stresses the importance of keeping a tight grip on their funding with the purpose of making economies through realistic appropriations, in line with real needs, and of avoiding over-budgeting. For better clarity and transparency, the Council expects the Commission to provide together with the PDB a concise and comprehensive budgetary overview covering all decentralised agencies.

The Council recalls the need to apply a thorough cost/benefit assessment before setting up new agencies and to implement the review clauses foreseen in their specific regulations. In addition, the Council invites the Commission to submit a comprehensive report to the budgetary authority so as to allow for a general assessment as to whether the existing strategy on decentralised agencies should be pursued.

- The Council reiterates the importance it attaches to the recruitment process in the context of enlargement and expects all institutions to take the necessary steps to carry it forward without delay, in line with the joint declaration agreed in the 2007 budgetary procedure.
13. The Council recalls that the budget is one of the most significant tools to guarantee the accountability of the European Union towards its citizens. Therefore, it attaches the greatest importance to these guidelines and expects them to be fully taken into account already in the Preliminary Draft Budget for 2008. These guidelines will be forwarded to the European Parliament and the Commission."